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DIRECTORATE OF
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Intelligence Memorandum

Cambodia and the Vietnamese Communists

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23

16 November 1967

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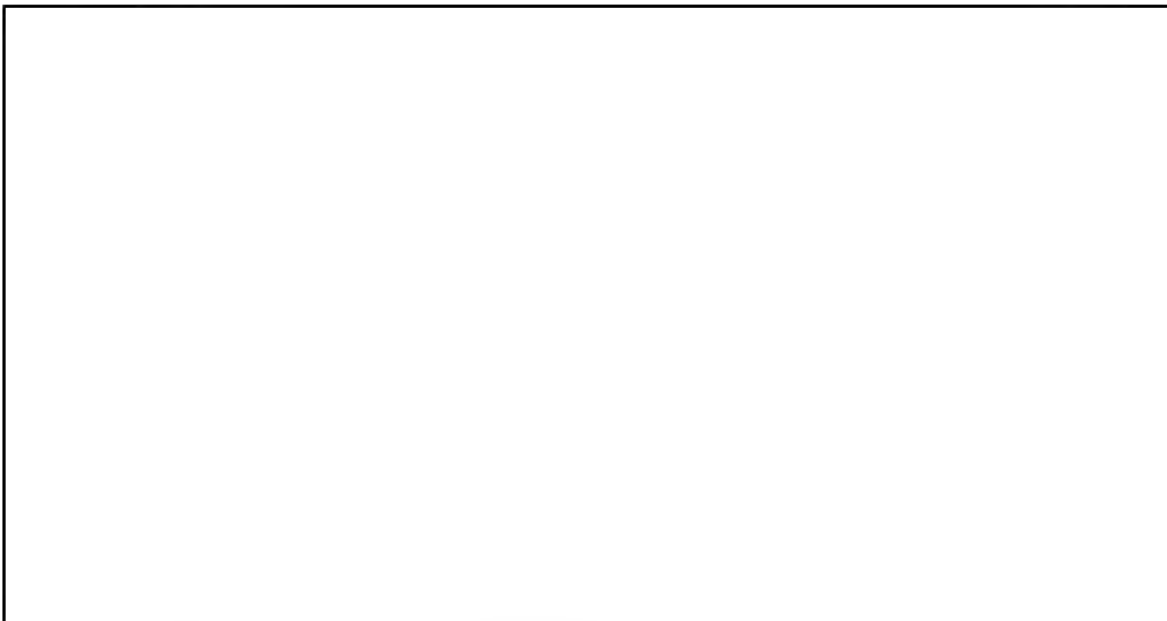
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
16 November 1967

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Cambodia and the Vietnamese Communists

A Monthly Report

Contents



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The Vietnamese Communists continue to obtain foodstuffs and other nonmilitary supplies from Cambodia (Para. 11). [redacted] says

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that his unit was based in Cambodia, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] that it procured ammunition in Cambodia, and
that a Cambodian border post promised his unit "mor-
tar fire support" if required during operations in
South Vietnam (Paras. 12-15).

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II. Political Developments: Prince Sihanouk
again denies that Vietnamese Communist troops are
based in Cambodia (Para. 20). Sihanouk reiterates
warning of consequences of US military operations
in Cambodia and restates his belief that the Commu-
nists will win in South Vietnam (Paras. 21-22).
Chou En-lai's most recent effort to improve Chinese-
Cambodian relations receives favorable response from
Sihanouk (Paras. 23-26).

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[redacted] recently, has described Communist facilities in Cambodia opposite southwestern Tay Ninh Province. He gave the location of a Viet Cong 300-man hospital and a hand-grenade factory on Cambodian territory and two Viet Cong broadcasting stations and a commo-liaison station along the border. He stated that at one time he had seen 250 North Vietnamese troops at the latter installation.

6. The area in which these facilities are located is one long associated with heavy Communist use. Captured enemy documents reveal that one of the principal uses the Communists make of Cambodian territory is the location of medical facilities.

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[redacted] statement also underlines the extent to which Communist base areas often overlap the Cambodian - South Vietnamese border.

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In addition to the problem of North Vietnamese regulars operating on its territory, Cambodia is now faced with a fresh and potentially serious outbreak of tribal dissidence there. Although no clashes have been reported, tribal people have mounted a number of large demonstrations and in one case surrounded and forced the evacuation of a police outpost. The tribesmen have been demonstrating against food shortages and the establishment of additional security posts by provincial authorities. Although there have been reports over the years that some of the montagnard tribes have been brought under Communist influence, it is not clear whether the current dissidence is Communist inspired. Some of the tribal dissidents, however, did protest Mrs. Kennedy's visit--a line which the Communists have pushed in other areas of Cambodia.

10. Phnom Penh is also showing some sensitivity to possible Allied intelligence operations in the northeast. The Cambodian press agency on 7 November cited "journalistic sources" in reporting that US forces were placing small teams in Ratanakiri Province to seek out "Viet Cong" forces and to lay the groundwork for a US "invasion."

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] There is also one unconfirmed report that three South Vietnamese soldiers who allegedly participated in such operations have been captured. The low-key attention which Phnom Penh has thus far accorded the alleged operations, however, suggests that it lacks hard evidence of any such activities.

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Supply Activity

11. The Communists are continuing to procure substantial amounts of foodstuffs and other non-military supplies from Cambodia. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] a large number of boats were moving north on the Tonle Kong River in September with foodstuffs and medical supplies for North Vietnamese forces in Laos. Although some lengthy disruptions have been reported, the level of traffic on the river so far this year appears to be similar to that observed in 1966. Meanwhile, supplies are also reaching the Vietnamese Communists along the South Vietnamese border, despite some Cambodian effort to curtail this illicit flow.

12. [REDACTED] has given an account of his unit's participation in combat and supply operations involving Cambodian territory. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] It transported ammunition from a cache on the Mekong River a mile inside Cambodia to a transfer area, also within Cambodia. Another unit relayed the ammunition to the Seven Mountains area of South Vietnam's Chau Doc Province. The ammunition, mostly of Chinese Communist origin, was for 60-mm. mortars, B-40 rocket launchers, and small arms.

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13. The source did not explain how the ammunition arrived at the Mekong pickup point, but he said that the Viet Cong did not use the Mekong as a north-south transportation route. They crossed the Mekong only at night, as required by the Cambodians to avoid "diplomatic embarrassment." He claimed that Cambodian civilians feared the presence of the Viet Cong because of the danger of hostilities developing in the area. The Viet Cong did, however, enjoy compatible relations with Cambodian military personnel. There were no restrictions on the Viet Cong other than the regulation to move supplies only at night.

14. [REDACTED] noted that his unit supported the Viet Cong [REDACTED] last March in an attack on an Allied post in South Vietnam. The battalion later retreated across the border to Cambodia

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with the dead and wounded, and remained there to "prepare for future operations." He claimed that a Cambodian border post provided the Viet Cong with small amounts of recoilless rifle ammunition during the attack and that the Cambodians assured them of "mortar fire support" if needed.

15. The border area [] has long been used by the Communists for sanctuary and supply. [] account of the battle, however, is at variance with captured Viet Cong documents which specifically prohibit Viet Cong units from crossing the border with weapons or conducting assaults from Cambodian territory. []

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[] account of Cambodian soldiers providing small amounts of ammunition may be true. It is doubtful that the Viet Cong were given a broad guarantee of Cambodian mortar support, or that instances of fire support are common along the border. [] statements, however, provide further evidence that the use of Cambodian territory by Communists is often determined by the extent of friendly relations with local officials.

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II. Political Developments

20. Prince Sihanouk took advantage of the presence of a large contingent of Western newsmen in Phnom Penh in early November to reiterate denials that Vietnamese Communist troops are based in Cambodia. As he has in the past when affecting a "reasonable" posture, Sihanouk admitted that it was possible that "small numbers" of Communist troops may occasionally pass through Cambodian territory. He asserted that when such troops are encountered by Cambodian patrols they are asked to return to South Vietnam. He also offered the newsmen government transportation to the northeast to "see for themselves" if North Vietnamese "divisions" are in Cambodia or whether the "Sihanouk trail" is being used.

21. Sihanouk did go farther than he has in the past to warn of the possible consequences of US military operations in Cambodia. He stated that Cambodia would resist any effort by the US to occupy territory along the border to prevent the Viet Cong from taking refuge there. He warned that such action would only serve to drive Cambodia into the hands of the Vietnamese Communists and Communist China.

22. Sihanouk also indicated that he still believes the Communists are going to prevail in South Vietnam. His reference to a US withdrawal within two years, however, does not jibe with his previous assertions that the US would not be driven from South Vietnam. He was also forced to admit that a Communist take-over in South Vietnam did not bode well for Cambodia's future.

Cambodia's Relations with Communist China

23. Prince Sihanouk has responded favorably to Peking's latest effort to ease its relations with Cambodia. Sihanouk announced on 1 November that he had received a message from Premier Chou En-lai calling for "re-establishment of sincere friendship" between the two countries. According to Sihanouk,

Chou acknowledged Sihanouk's leadership of the Cambodian people and reaffirmed China's adherence to the "Bandung principle" of nonintervention in Cambodia's internal affairs. Sihanouk has charged repeatedly over the past several months that China's propaganda activities in Cambodia amounted to a repudiation of these "principles."

24. The Chinese premier's message, which played on Sihanouk's personal regard for Chou, appears to be a more artful version of one Chou sent in mid-September which caused Sihanouk to reverse a decision to withdraw Cambodian diplomatic personnel from Peking.

25. In response to the latest message, Sihanouk stated his willingness to terminate anti-Peking propaganda and accept a "complete reconciliation." Subsequently, he also called off a referendum he had previously scheduled for early next year. The referendum was intended as a vote of confidence in Sihanouk's government and, as such, would have been embarrassing for the pro-Peking leftists who have called for a change in Sihanouk's policies.

26. The Prince has also stated, however, that a real reconciliation will depend entirely on the cessation of Communist activity in Cambodia. Thus, continued dissemination of Communist propaganda throughout the country, and a reported renewal of small-scale Communist dissident activity, could prove to be persistent irritants in Cambodia's relations with China. Nevertheless, although Sihanouk recently again voiced his suspicion that Peking will continue discreet support of Cambodia's pro-Communists, his response to Chou's letter underlines his desire to maintain at least a facade of cordial relations.

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